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ABSTRACT

The Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU) analyzed draft plans, required by the Education Reform Act 1988, from about 40 percent of the local education authorities (LEAs) in England and Wales to identify basic skills and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) provisions for adults. Topics of concern were the maintenance of programs at existing levels and the possibilities for further development of the programs. Most plans received attempted to take account of basic skills and ESOL provision, although a minority did not. In addition to the analysis of the draft plans, this booklet illustrates some of the emerging patterns adopted by LEAs. The conclusion is reached that it is possible to strengthen adult literacy, basic skills, and ESOL provision in the plans and provide a firm base for future development. (CML)

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THE EDUCATION REFORM ACT 1988

Basic Skills
and Schools of
Delegation

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THE EDUCATION REFORM ACT 1988

Basic Skills and Schemes of Delegation

ALBSU
Adult Literacy & Basic Skills Unit

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Introduction

The Education Reform Act 1988 requires all Local Education Authorities to present a scheme of Local College Management to the Secretary of State for Education and Science or the Secretary of State for Wales. This sets out the arrangements for delegating to the Governing Body of colleges responsibility for managing the finances of the college, together with other duties. A Scheme of Delegation must include details of the LEAs' arrangements for:

- planning
- delegation
- budgeting

Although the Act is not explicitly concerned with basic skills and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) work with adults, much of this area of work is delivered at present through further education colleges and the change in governance and autonomy of colleges will clearly have implications for future provision.

In late 1988 ALBSU published "After the Act – Developing Basic Skills Work in the 1990s" and circulated it widely to LEAs, colleges of further education and practitioners throughout England and Wales. "After the Act" aimed to provide guidance to LEAs on the implications of ERA and the importance of taking account of basic skills and ESOL needs in producing Schemes of Delegation and Strategic Plans for further education.

'Basic Skills and Schemes of Delegation' provides an analysis of draft Schemes of Delegation of about 40% of the LEAs in England and Wales. In the main, these Schemes have yet to be finalised and, therefore, we have not referred by name to specific authorities. Many have still to take account of local consultation before being submitted to the Secretary of State by 30 September 1989. We have not attempted, therefore, to provide a detailed account of all of the Schemes received by ALBSU from LEAs in England and Wales but have aimed, rather, to provide an overview focussing particularly on basic skills provision for adults.

'Basic Skills and Schemes of Delegation' illustrates some of the emerging patterns adopted by LEAs. It should, therefore, prove useful to practitioners,

officers and others interested in basic skills work, as well as to those LEAs which still have to finalise their own Schemes.

Although the provisions of the 1988 Education Reform Act are fairly complex, it is important that practitioners and others committed to basic skills and ESOL work with adults take a close interest in Schemes of Delegation devised by LEAs. Most authorities are including a period for consultation and it is crucial that comments are made at that stage. Two questions are worth asking about all Schemes of Delegation:

- At the very least will the proposals included in the Scheme allow basic skills and ESOL provision to be maintained at existing levels?
- Will the proposals included in the Scheme allow basic skills and ESOL provision to be further developed in future years?

Planning

ITEM 1: Statement of procedures for planning the further and higher education provision to be made in colleges.

Most authorities propose establishing a specific Planning Group or Committee to draw up a development plan for further education in the LEA area. Some do not detail the membership of such a group, whilst other LEAs suggest that membership of the planning group will be drawn from a number of interested bodies as well as include elected members, college governors and staff and authority officers. Few describe how consultation will be undertaken concerning the formulation of a plan, in any detail.

While the proposals for planning tend to follow a similar pattern some LEAs have specific approaches. One authority, for instance, proposes to establish five curriculum planning groups, with one group meeting on Access, including ESOL, 'Return to Learn' courses and Special Needs.

ALBSU believes that it is important for LEAs to ensure that the need for Basic Skills and ESOL provision for adults is included in planning and that access points are created for those with specialist knowledge of these areas of work to contribute to the formulation of plans.

ITEM 2: Statement of the cycle the authority will use for the longer-term planning of provision.

The majority of the LEA Schemes propose using a three year planning cycle with a detailed plan for the first year. A considerable number of these authorities intend to fit the planning of further education as a whole into the planning cycle for Work Related Non-Advanced Further Education (WRNAFE).

A minority of LEAs intend to use a longer cycle for planning, usually of five years.

ITEM 3: Statement of the range of the provision which is to be taken into account in the authority's planning and in particular the procedures for ensuring co-ordination of post-16 provision across the schools and FE sectors and co-ordination of FE provision in LEA colleges with provision commissioned from PCFC institutions.

The majority of LEAs which currently have a 'free-standing' adult education service, providing most basic skills and ESOL provision, have included the service in planning but excepted it for the purposes of financial delegation. Thus, the general colleges budget usually excludes the cost of adult and community education (including basic skills and ESOL) provision made as part of a 'free-standing' service.

A small number of LEAs have decided to undertake a longer-term review of adult and community education provision, particularly where this service is provided in full or in part outside of colleges of further education. Some authorities are considering abandoning a separate 'free-standing' adult or community education service and giving responsibility for this area of post-school provision to colleges of further education. Others are considering the restructuring of adult or community education provision to bring institutions to the level of 200 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) students, and, thereby, within the delegation requirement.

Most LEAs intend to take account of post-school provision made by PCFC institutions and by voluntary organisations and private agencies although few are specific about how this might be achieved. This will be particularly important in respect of basic skills and ESOL provision for adults, particularly as a considerable amount of tuition is provided by Training Managers and Training Agents as part of Employment Training (ET) and the Youth Training Scheme (YTS).

ALBSU believes that it is essential for each LEA to establish a forum for the exchange of information by providers of basic skills and ESOL provision for adults in the area.

ITEM 4: Statement of the arrangements to be made for collaborating with relevant LEAs to secure the regional co-ordination of further and higher education provision in the LEA sector.

Almost all LEAs mention the role of Regional Advisory Councils (and the Welsh Joint Education Committee in Wales) in ensuring the co-ordination of further education provision. A significant number of authorities also propose to liaise with neighbouring LEAs which are not in the same further education regions. Some propose to establish sub-regional groups for the exchange of information for planning purposes.

ALBSU believes that the regional network established by ALBSU and RACs over a number of years for staff development and training can provide a valuable forum for the exchange of information about Basic Skills and ESOL.

ITEM 5: Statement of which factors the Authority will take into account in planning provision.

Most LEAs plan to take account of a wide range of factors, including authority policies and priorities, student demand, changing labour market demands and demographic trends in planning further education provision.

The need for the provision of basic skills, ESOL and special needs has been explicitly accepted in many of the Schemes of Delegation. Some have made specific reference to this in the aims of the service, or as a factor in planning provision:

> *"to ensure that all such programmes/courses are accessible to all those who wish and are able to benefit from them, taking into account the difficulties experienced by non-traditional client groups, including those who are functionally illiterate/innumerate."*

> *"The Authority will continue to support the work of Colleges and Adult Education in such areas as Special Educational Needs, English as a Second Language and Adult Basic Education."*

Some Schemes of Delegation also specify other factors which may be important for basic skills and ESOL provision including:

- increasing **Access** to further education;
- an increase in the participation of **Part-time Students** in colleges;
- the development of **Open Learning.**

ALBSU believes that it is essential that LEAs take account of Basic Skills and ESOL needs in the area in planning further education provision. In a needs led rather than demand led service it is important that, in the longer term, LEAs undertake a needs analysis in respect of Basic Skills and ESOL provisio in their area.

ITEM 9: Statement of classification of subject areas and other groupings of work to be used in allocating student numbers to colleges.

All authorities have used the Training and Occupation Classification (TOC) system. In addition almost all LEAs have added to the subject based classification some specific programme areas.

Many authorities have chosen to include basic skills (and in rather fewer instances ESOL) as part of a programme area called Special Educational Needs. Where this is the case a distinction is made by most LEAs between special needs provision for young people and adults with handicaps and disabilities and basic skills and ESOL provision.

A number of authorities have proposed basic skills work as a specific programme area, under various titles, including:

- basic education;
- essential skills;
- essential adult learning;
- basic literacy and numeracy;

and within general programme areas, e.g. Special Categories, Access.

In a few instances basic skills work has been included within the TOC V category for General Education. One authority has proposed a sub-division of TOC V to take account of different curriculum areas within General Education and specifically mentions literacy and numeracy provision as one of the sub-divisions.

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) also appears as a specific programme area within some Schemes of Delegation (mainly those of authorities where a considerable level of ESOL provision exists), or is linked to basic skills work.

ALBSU believes that Basic Skills and ESOL should be identified as programme areas in Schemes of Delegation either under the heading of special educational needs or in their own right.

ITEM 10: Statement of mode weightings to be used for converting student numbers into full-time equivalents.

Although the DES Guidance suggested that authorities do not need to use the weightings set out in Schedule 9 to the Act to calculate full-time equivalents, a number of LEAs have used those weightings. (The weightings in Schedule 9 were only included in the Act for the purpose of determining which institutions should transfer to the PCFC sector and which should receive delegated budgets).

These use the following weightings for converting to full-time equivalents:

- Part-time (day) 0.125
- Part-time (evening only) 0.075
- Open/distance learning 0.075

and low weightings like those above clearly do not benefit services which are largely part-time and which are moving to providing increased opportunities through various types of open learning.

A number of authorities have, however, determined to increase part-time participation in colleges. In these cases mode weightings have been

increased to favour part-time attendance, up to a weighting of 0.3. However, Open Learning provision remains subject to a low mode multiplier, despite many authorities commitment to introduce more open learning opportunities across the college curriculum.

Where authorities have proposed an alternative formula for determining mode weightings, it is usually to take account of the range of patterns of part-time attendance. For example the formula used by two LEAs in London attempts to encourage a move away from the two hour class mode of attendance whilst retaining part-time attendance. These LEAs propose a formula of 0.04t, where 't' is the number of hours attendance per week. Hence a student who attends for two hours per week receives a weighting of 0.08; however, a student who attends for four hours, receives a weighting of 0.16.

The low mode weighting given to open/distance learning by some authorities is likely to lead, in the Unit's view, to a decrease in the scale of learning opportunities of this type in favour of more traditional forms of learning. This is to be regretted particularly at a time when considerable priority is being given to the development of a greater variety of learning opportunities including open learning in basic skills and ESOL.

ALBSU reiterates its view that LEAs should use more appropriate weightings than those set out in Schedule 9 of the Act in order to take account of the part-time nature of much Basic Skills and ESOL Provision and the development of Open and Distance Learning.

ITEM 11: Statement of the status of student number allocations, and the discretion of colleges to enrol higher or lower student numbers, and to "vire" between allocations, in the light of changing circumstances.

Most LEAs take the view that target number allocations will largely reflect historical patterns especially in the early years of delegation. Almost all authorities propose to allow colleges to enrol higher or lower numbers of

students and to "vire" allocations of funds between programme areas. Often, Schemes of Delegation contain a phrase such as 'having full regard to the LEAs strategic objectives' in allowing colleges to "vire" funds. Other LEAs place a limit on virement of say 10% between programme areas although in some cases colleges will be allowed to exceed this figure after specific consultation with the LEA or with the LEAs' permission.

ALBSU believes that colleges should only be able to "vire" funds from the Basic Skills and ESOL programme areas with the express permission of the LEA particularly as it is all too easy, through lack of adequate publicity and commitment, to seemingly demonstrate that lack of demand indicates a lack of need.

ITEM 13: Statement of procedures for monitoring college performance, including main categories of data which the authority will require colleges to provide each year, and any requirements for an annual report.

The Act requires Local Education Authorities to devise procedures for monitoring college performance, and to specify data to be provided by colleges for that purpose. Most LEAs propose to base their monitoring and evaluation of colleges' performance on the performance indicators as suggested in the Joint Efficiency Study, "Managing Colleges Efficiently". Thus, considerable statistical information will be required by LEAs from colleges including student enrolment numbers, staff/student ratios (SSRs), completion rates, qualifications gained, utilisation of accommodation, cost per student, etc. In addition some LEAs are proposing to require reports on special projects funded through external agencies as well as consider student, community and employer perceptions although most do not provide much information on how this is to be achieved.

Whilst Item 13 is concerned with the monitoring of a colleges' general performance, it is likely that each programme area will need to be monitored and that performance indicators will need to be developed for very different areas of post-school education provision.

At present few LEAs or practitioners appear to have had very much experience in evaluating the effectiveness of basic skills and ESOL provision. Rather, there has been an assumption that basic skills work is a socially worthwhile activity, the success of which is difficult to assess. While this may be true, and certainly basic skills provision is very different from much other further education, ALBSU believes that it is essential that appropriate performance indicators are developed based on good practice.

ALBSU is currently developing a good practice document on evaluating the effectiveness of basic skills provision for adults and this should inform LEAs' approach to this area of monitoring.

Setting the Colleges Budget

ITEM 21: Statement of how the costs of specified administration and advisory services covered by the excepted item will be handled in calculating college budgets, and in particular to what extent the costs will be included within college budgets, whether as earmarked or as delegated funds.

LEAs have taken a variety of attitudes to the continued employment of authority co-ordinators for basic education and ESOL. Some are planning to incorporate these posts in their Advisory Service with a support and monitoring role and treat this as an Excepted Item under the Act.

Most authorities have, however, opted to include the total cost or an element of the cost of advisory services in the colleges budget with a requirement to "buy" advisory services from the LEA. (Option B in the DES Guidance Circular). This would be a purely notional transaction. A few LEAs have earmarked sums for the advisory service in the colleges budget without the requirement to "buy" from the LEA (Option C).

Whilst some LEAs are intending to consider how to let colleges have complete freedom to determine where they purchase such services from over the next few years, others, while allowing colleges to determine how much of the service to buy, intend that the service should have to be purchased from the LEA rather than from any other source (Option D). Some other authorities have not yet made decisions on which Option to adopt.

ALBSU believes that it is essential that specialist staff are available to support and monitor basic skills and ESOL provision in each LEA. ALBSU re-iterates its recommendation that LEAs adopt Option B, whereby an LEA determines the sum that needs to be spent in respect of the advisory service for basic skills and ESOL, incorporates this sum in the colleges budget and requires a college to use the sum to 'buy' the service from the authority.

ITEM 23: Statement whether the authority will hold a development fund; if so, how the funds allocated to it are to be determined, and the main types of activities to be supported from it.

Almost every LEA proposes to maintain a development fund. In some cases authorities do not specify the level of the fund and in others it is suggested that it will be determined on a year by year basis. The majority of LEAs have, however, fixed the level of the development fund at between 1% and 2% of the overall colleges budget.

Most authorities intend to use this fund for innovative work, on a 'pump-priming' basis. Some have determined specific areas for funding, including the following:

- "adult programmes and strategies, including educational guidance"
- "needs specific to individual colleges which cannot adequately be met through the student number allocation (for example in the field of Special Needs)"
- "courses and activities provided in conjunction with voluntary groups"
- "development of provision for groups under represented by further education"
- "as matching funds towards grants made by industry and from other sources"
- "the LEA contribution to specific grants"
- "any other initiatives the LEA considers appropriate as part of its strategic role".

ALBSU believes that there are strong reasons why basic skills and ESOL should have a high priority in considering the allocation of resources available from an LEAs Development Fund.

ITEM 25: Statement of general procedures for reserving specific grant funds and any contribution the authority is required to add to them.

In nearly all of the LEA Schemes of Delegation received by the Unit funding from external bodies, in the form of specific grants, has been treated as an excepted item and either held centrally or earmarked within college budgets. While some LEAs intend to retain control of the negotiation of grants, others are prepared to allow colleges to negotiate grants direct subject to the LEAs approval in principle.

In general authorities propose to find any financial contribution required from within the Development Fund although a number of authorities have suggested that "in certain cases, contributions are to be found from the college's delegated budget as a condition of acceptance of the specific grant."

ALBSU confirms that project funding agreed by the Unit will need to be treated as an excepted item by LEAs. Applications for development project funding will need to be submitted formally by LEAs although negotiation may be undertaken, subject to the authority's agreement, with individual colleges.

ITEM 27: Statement of any other items which the authority intend to treat as excepted, indicating how the funds attributable to them will be determined, and how they will be used.

A significant number of authorities have recognised the importance of developing college programmes to provide for the needs of adults who have not traditionally had access to college provision, including those adults with a range of learning difficulties. Most LEAs have tried to achieve this through the specific inclusion of basic skills and other essential needs in the factors to be taken account of in planning.

A few authorities have gone even further by proposing to include basic skills work as an excepted item in the college budget. For example:

> *"Funding for ABE (adult basic education) will be withheld to protect such provision and allocation on the basis of need."*
>
> *"Funding to meet costs of providing such adult basic education as it (the LEA) considers appropriate."*

One Authority proposes that "additional costs of providing basic skills to students attending courses in mainstream programme areas" should be included as an excepted item; this funding supplementing a favourable programme area weighting for basic skills provision.

Whilst it is encouraging that basic skills provision is considered sufficiently important to warrant this rather special consideration, it may be difficult for basic skills provision to develop adequately particularly as the excepted item budget is required under the Act to reduce from 15% of the colleges budget to 10% over three years.

ITEM 30: Statement of programme area weighting to be used for distributing funds on the basis of student number allocations, including any non-subject-based weightings.

In LEAs where basic skills (and in some cases ESOL) provision is included in the Special Needs programme area the level of weighting varies between 1.6. and 2.6. Where a specific programme area has been established for basic skills or basic education provision for adults, (often including provision of English for speakers of other languages), the proposed weighting varies between 1.3 and 2.0.

A considerable number of LEAs have recognised the argument put forward by the Unit in 'Resourcing Adult Literacy and Basic Skills' for a lower staff student ratio (SSR) for basic skills work. For example, an LEA with a weighting of 1.8 for Special Programmes, including adult literacy and ESOL work, bases this on an SSR of 1:7, and a resources weighting of 2.0.

One or two authorities have adopted other strategies to weight work in this area. One authority has expanded TOC V (General Education) to include a category (TOC V1) for basic skills, and proposes a weighting of 2.0 for this category of work. Another LEA has weightings for the various TOC categories and, in addition, proposes a supplementary weighting of 1.75 for work in Special Needs, including basic skills, across the TOC categories.

It may be useful to compare the different proposed weightings for basic skills and ESOL provision with the weightings proposed for general adult education. In the draft Schemes of Delegation received by the Unit, weightings of 0.3, 0.5 and 0.8 are fairly common. In the main, this appears to be a reflection of authorities' view of adult education as an area of work where significant costs can be off-set through income from student fees.

It seems likely that in LEAs where basic skills and ESOL is delivered wholly or in part through colleges of further education, with delegated budgets, these areas of work will begin to be seen as increasingly separate from general adult education.

ALBSU believes that the higher costs of basic skills and ESOL provision needs to be reflected in programme area weightings. The actual costs of providing an adequate service, as defined in the Unit's good practice documents, should be reflected in the calculation of weightings by authorities. This needs, in ALBSU's view, a programme area weighting of at least 2.0 for basic skills and ESOL.

ITEM 32: Statement whether programme, mode of attendance or level weightings are intended to reflect actual costs or to provide a policy steer.

Most LEAs have not used programme area weightings to provide a policy steer for basic skills and ESOL provision. Rather, they have attempted to reflect the actual cost of provision.

A few LEAs have, however, proposed a policy steer for basic skills provision; this seems to be particularly the case where this area of work has been identified as an authority priority as part of a policy for further education.

ALBSU believes that it is essential that the basic skills and ESOL provision for adults is seen as a priority area of development in LEA policies for post-16 education. Whilst specific areas of further development could usefully be included as an excepted item, the core of provision will need to be seen as part of the general colleges budget.

Delegation to the Governing Body

ITEM 10 Statement of powers and responsibilities of governing bodies within the scope of delegation with respect to the management of colleges, and the conditions to be observed in exercising them.

The Education Reform Act 1988 requires LEAs to make proposals for the constitution, powers and duties of governing bodies of further education institutions.

In 'After the Act", ALBSU recommended that "it is desirable for at least one governor to be asked to take an interest in, and play a lead role in, the development of basic skills work in the college."

In general most LEAs have, in the Instruments and Articles of Government, left powers of co-option and specific curriculum responsibilities to the governors themselves to decide. However, some authorities have recommended that governing bodies should take particular account of special educational needs, including basic skills, so that one, or in some cases two, governors take responsibility for this area of provision. It is suggested that this should be either through co-option or nomination of specific governors to take such responsibility.

Hopefully after constitution, new governing bodies will specifically consider this matter. For its part, ALBSU intends to offer training to college governors in order to familiarise them with basic skills work.

ALBSU reiterates the view that it is desirable for at least one governor of each college to be asked to take an interest in, and play a lead role in, basic skills and ESOL work in each college.

Use of School Premises (DES Circular 7/88)

Most LEAs are particularly concerned about the use of school premises after Local Management of Schools takes effect and school governors become responsible for the use of school buildings. This is of particular concern in basic education and ESOL as much provision is located in schools.

It is encouraging, therefore, that most LEAs are devising formulae that give some priority to the authority's use of school buildings. Clearly it would be serious if one of the effects of giving greater control to governors was that schools, with all of the resources that they contain, were to be less available for basic skills and ESOL provision, particularly as alternative accommodation would be expensive and in some circumstances difficult to find.

ALBSU believes that it is essential that basic skills and ESOL work with adults is given priority in the use of school premises.

Conclusion

Schemes of Delegation set out the structural and financial context within which the planning of further education provision will take place. Decisions on planning procedures, mode weightings, programme areas, excepted items, programme area weightings, virement and other items in Schemes will have a significant effect on the future development of basic skills and ESOL provision in many areas of England and Wales.

It is particularly encouraging that most Schemes of Delegation received by the Unit attempt to take account of basic skills and ESOL provision and have tried to reflect the features of this essential post-16 provision. ALBSU regrets that a minority of Schemes of Delegation do not, in the Unit's view, take appropriate account of the work included in the Unit's remit particularly as this may lead to a diminution of such provision in the next few years.

A number of Schemes of Delegation, however, still have to be drafted and others are able to be modified following consultation. Whilst it is for the Secretary of State for Education and Science to approve Schemes of Delegation submitted by LEAs, ALBSU intends to draw to the attention of the Secretary of State the need to consider how proposals will affect basic skills and ESOL provision for adults.

ALBSU believes that it is possible to strengthen adult literacy and basic skills and ESOL provision in Schemes of Delegation and provide a firm base for future development. On the other hand, poorly thought out proposals are likely to weaken current provision and undermine the opportunities for development in the 1990s.